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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000493

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2017

TAGS: KWBG PGOV KPAL IS KISL PREL

SUBJECT: FATAH REFORM: GAZA COMMITTEE CHIEF SAYS RAPID INTERNAL REFORM IMPERATIVE

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a March 6 DVC with NEA DAS Scott Carpenter, Gaza Fatah Committee chairman Majid Abu Shammali said 18 years without democracy in Fatah decision-making is principally to blame for the faction's "catastrophic" defeat in January 2006 elections. He said the loss was a needed wake-up call and has resulted in significant internal reforms to reintroduce democracy, including completion of local elections throughout Gaza within three months. The international assistance embargo is mostly hurting Fatah, he said, as Fatah members rely more on security force/government salaries, while Hamas has its own funding sources, and attracts domestic sympathy for opposing the unpopular "siege." While Fatah has a capable media coordinator and prints 35,000 copies of its newsletter weekly, he said more international assistance is needed to counter Hamas' domination of the media, including printing presses and a radio station. Fatah can capitalize on major potential advantages, he said, as Hamas' extremist messages are not generally acceptable and Hamas is not internally democratic. Reported Barghuthi-Dahlan divisions are exaggerated, he said. Fatah is united by a common Hamas threat, and the only real internal divide is between "old guard" and grassroots activists, he said. End Summary.

Fatah's Lack of Democracy  
Caused Election "Catastrophe"

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¶2. (C) Gaza Fatah Committee chairman Majid Abu Shammali said 18 years without democracy in Fatah decision-making is principally to blame for the faction's "catastrophic" defeat in January 2006 elections. Without a Fatah General Conference (FGC) (the last was held in 1989) to elect new senior leadership, he said, the movement stagnated under figures more interested in protecting their own power than making Fatah more inclusive. The PA's poor performance is secondarily to blame for Fatah's loss, he said, as the majority of the PA's political leaders and government officials were Fatah members or allies and voters associated the PA's failings with Fatah incompetence.

Gaza Fatah Elections to  
Rebuild Grassroots Strength

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¶3. (C) Abu Shammali said Fatah's electoral defeat was a needed wake-up call and has resulted in significant internal reforms to remedy past errors and reintroduce democracy in faction governance. Among recent reforms, he said Fatah: a) officially made President Abbas the faction's General Commander, which weakened the Fatah Central Committee (FCC); b) created national, West Bank and Gaza Fatah Committees,

whose members have individual outreach responsibilities; c) held an anniversary attended by over 200,000 people; and d) conducted local and union elections for new Fatah council representatives in seven Gaza precincts (including Rafah and Dayr al-Balah) and for the engineers' and doctors' unions.

¶4. (C) In the next three months, Fatah will complete elections in Khan Yunis, Gaza City and remaining precincts, and for representatives from the lawyers, teachers and student unions. Those selected will in turn elect regional (West Bank and Gaza) Fatah committees (current members were appointed by President Abbas) and the conference attendees who will elect the FCC and Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) members at a future FGC. Only registered Fatah members can vote in precinct elections, and members must have been official Fatah members for at least two years to run for party office.

¶5. (C) Comment: While Fatah contacts have discussed a sixth FGC for years, no preparations have been initiated. A new FGC (all heretofore conducted before PLO agreements with Israel) would require local elections from Fatah constituencies worldwide, and major preparations in a venue free from Israeli access restrictions. End comment.

Abu Shammali: "Siege Hurts Fatah While Hamas Builds Power"

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¶6. (C) The international embargo on PA assistance mostly hurts Fatah, Abu Shammali said, as Fatah members, who compose most of the security forces and government offices, are not receiving salaries. Hamas, as a full subsidiary of the regional Muslim Brotherhood, has its own funding, he said,

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and also attracts domestic sympathy for opposing the unpopular "siege."

Fatah's Message and Public Relations/Outreach

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¶7. (C) Fatah has a major potential advantage over Hamas, Abu Shammali asserted, as Fatah's platform remains more attractive to the general public. He said Fatah is casting differences with Hamas as a battle between secular-democratic forces and regional Islamists without practical solutions. Fatah's Gaza offices have appointed a chief media coordinator, Tawfiq Abu Khusa, and print 35,000 copies of its newsletter weekly, he said. The committee is working with NDI on membership registration, message development and technical preparations for internal elections, he said, but added Fatah needs significant media assistance. He requested that NDI provide a printing press and radio station. He said Fatah public outreach efforts are inferior to Hamas' well-resourced media machine, which issues professional-quality newsletters and includes television broadcasts.

Abu Shammali Downplays Barghuthi-Dahlan Divide

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¶8. (C) Reported divisions between followers of jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghuthi and PLC/FRC member Muhammad Dahlan are exaggerated, Abu Shammali said, and Dahlan has good relations with all of Fatah's streams in Gaza. He said Dahlan is working on rebuilding and restructuring the security forces, while the Gaza Fatah Committee helps Dahlan by identifying Fatah members who will be good additions to the security forces. Fatah is united by a common threat in Hamas, he said, and the only real internal divides are

between Fatah's FCC and other "old guard" types and lower-level, grassroots activists.

¶9. (U) DAS Carpenter cleared this message.

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